



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Robert Spillar, P.E., Director, *Robert Spillar*  
Austin Transportation Department

**DATE:** September 30, 2021

**SUBJECT:** 2021 Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) Amendments – Response to Resolution No. 20200610-022

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This memo serves as an update on the 2021 Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) Amendment process.

Austin Transportation Department (ATD) staff initiated the process to amend the ASMP in May 2021. The first step of the amendment process included an interdepartmental review of the ASMP policies, action items, and the Street Network Table and Map. The interdepartmental review effort identified several potential policy amendments that will be published for public comment on October 1, 2021. Review of the Street Network Table is ongoing, but is anticipated to result in potential amendments, including those necessary to reflect the adopted Project Connect System Plan which will be published for public comment in November 2021. The following provides more detail of the upcoming amendment process.

### Summary of Interdepartmental Review

The ASMP was adopted unanimously by Council in April 2019, therefore this amendment process is intended to be limited in scope. An effort to evaluate the direction of the ASMP and provide re-direction will occur as we approach the five-year anniversary. Considering this, the ASMP team began the review process by evaluating the ASMP policies and action items for any gaps or weaknesses, focusing on events that occurred over the past two years that may not have been adequately addressed in the adopted ASMP.

After the ASMP team concluded its review, all Departments who had previously participated in the creation of the ASMP were invited to an internal kick-off meeting on July 15, 2021. In this meeting, departments were briefed on the scope of the amendment process and welcomed to schedule meetings with the ASMP team to discuss potential amendments. The ASMP team requested meetings to discuss specific policies and action items that were identified during the ASMP team review. In all, meetings were held with multiple divisions in ATD, Public Works, Economic Development, Office of Sustainability, Housing and Planning, and the Project Connect Office.

The interdepartmental review process of the ASMP policies and action items concluded at the end of August 2021. Several policy areas were identified for discussion, but many were

considered to be beyond the scope of the two-year update or were decided to be addressed through ongoing coordination or reflected in updated action items. These comments included understanding the policy conflict between connectivity and access management, and safety and efficiency, elevating the pedestrian as a priority Downtown, the role of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, alignment with the Austin Climate Equity Plan, and the importance of planning for maintenance of infrastructure and life cycle costs. The ASMP team will continue to coordinate on these issues and assess them again during future updates of the ASMP.

### **Proposed Policy Amendments**

Considering the timing of this two-year amendment process, only three new policies are being proposed as amendments and will be presented to the public for review. Minor changes, such as typos, technical corrections, and other supporting textual changes, will be presented during the Boards & Commissions and Council adoption process in early 2022.

The three proposed policies are based on events that have occurred in recent years and during the pandemic that were not adequately addressed in the adopted ASMP. First, while we've always had festivals, parades, protests, and families playing in neighborhood streets, our community's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased demand for making greater use of our streets to meet non-mobility needs suggests the need to create policy related to alternative uses. The inability to safely gather indoors with people outside our households led the City to implement places for food pick-up, dining, and spaces for mental and physical health with initiatives like Shop the Block and Healthy Streets. As our community's needs to make greater use of our public right of way continue to expand, the City must be prepared to support all these diverse uses within our streets. The following policy is being proposed to address this issue in the ASMP.

#### **Support streets as places where non-mobility community functions can take place**

*Recognize the diverse and expanding civic needs within our right of way and promote adaptive uses of the street*

Some of the ways we can achieve this are to provide additional safe space for physical activity, play, socializing, or providing critical services or physical distancing opportunities. We could extend sidewalks, allow for markets or dining to take place in the street, and repurpose parking in appropriate locations for food pick-up or delivery. To support streets as civic spaces, we could use our right of way to increase opportunities to vote or learn, as well as consider how our streets are designed to facilitate safe access to public spaces for demonstration and protest as a fundamental civic right. These are just a few of the many creative uses of our public right of way that our community could implement using this policy.

Second, in recent years, we experienced several major climate-related emergencies, including extreme heat and drought, wildfires, flooding, and increasingly disastrous storms. Early this year, Winter Storm Uri severely impacted our community as well as our transportation network. The City's Winter Storm Uri Task Force produced a report of personal stories and community experiences in which transportation was identified as one of the major barriers to seeking safety. Other recent emergencies like community water boil notices or mass COVID-

19 testing and vaccinations have strained our community's ability to safely and easily access critical services necessary to meet basic daily needs. In order to prepare our city for future extreme weather events and other major emergency events, transportation resilience must be at the heart of our mobility planning as well as our day-to-day operations. The following two policies are being proposed to address this issue in the ASMP.

**Increase the transportation network's adaptive capacity**

*Improve the resilience of our transportation infrastructure and operations to flexibly adapt to climate impacts.*

Adaptive capacity is the ability of a system to change in response to shocks and stressors while maintaining normal functions. For example, over the course of a few days in June 2021, the City lost over 100 signals due to lightning strikes during unusually strong thunderstorms. Maintaining safe roadway operations with so many signals offline can prove challenging and reveals the need to ensure our systems can handle any shocks like this in the future, for example with technologies like back-up batteries to operate our signals. Other stressors are more long-term, such as our changing climate's effects on physical infrastructure like bridges, roads, and urban trails. We will need to design and construct our transportation network to be robust and flexible enough to withstand the impacts of climate change. This policy aims to build on the work of the 2018 Climate Resilience Action Plan and turn any identified or potential weaknesses in our transportation network into opportunities.

**Support larger City efforts for disaster preparedness and emergency response**

*Coordinate with local and regional partners to protect and support our community during extreme events.*

Winter Storm Uri revealed how vulnerable our infrastructure is, and also how vulnerable our community is when major systems like the electrical grid fail, leading to system failure in the transportation network. This highlights the need for improved disaster preparedness and emergency response planning within the City and across our region. With the goal to improve our disaster preparedness and emergency response, we aim to support all members of our community to find and reach safety, especially those who are most at risk. Emergency response actions include identifying egress and ingress routes for community members, developing mobility plans for resilience hubs, and creating emergency communication plans for community members as well as staff. Developing these items before another disaster event occurs will better prepare us to assist our community in real time. Learning from each major event is also critical in order to prepare for the next emergency. We should conduct post-event reports and collaborate across the City to create emergency response plans, paying special attention to the roles and responsibilities that transportation plays in achieving these outcomes. Coordination with regional transportation partners on disaster preparedness and emergency response is also essential for continued access and movement in the event of an emergency.

**Public Engagement**

To support the amendment process, the ASMP team will be releasing a survey on October 1, 2021 in order to create awareness and collect public comments. The public comment period will be held open until the end of 2021 and will be organized around two phases, 1) Policy

*Delivering a safe, reliable, and sustainable transportation system  
that enhances the environment and economic strength of the region.*

Amendments (on the policies referenced above) and 2) Map Amendments. The second phase will include a presentation of maps with proposed changes to the Street Network and Public Transportation System, based on the adopted Project Connect System Plan.

Due to the challenging conditions of the pandemic and competing engagement needs from the community, such as I-35 Capital Express, Project Connect, and ATX Walk Bike Roll, the ASMP team acknowledges the difficulty of public participation in this amendment process. In-person engagement opportunities, like the community meetings and pop-up events held during the adoption of the ASMP, are not being planned at this time. While shifting to online engagement allows the process to move forward, not all communities are equipped with the broadband infrastructure or cellular service that is needed to support it. Survey materials will also be available in Spanish. Written feedback options will also be made available in City libraries and as requested. In order to look for discrepancies in community representation, the ASMP team will be monitoring the survey and summarizing results by geographic area and demographics. Equitable engagement is a top priority of the adopted ASMP, as referenced in the Equity and Public Interaction subchapters of the Supporting our Community chapter. The ASMP team will work closely with Council offices and the community to correct for these discrepancies to the best of our ability when they arise.

The final round of public engagement, which will include all proposed changes to the ASMP, is anticipated to occur in early 2022 during the Boards & Commissions and Council adoption process. The ASMP team will provide a summary of all public comments received during the survey period and the public will be able to provide testimonies through the formal adoption process.

### **Next Steps**

Below is the schedule and next steps in the ASMP amendment process:

October 2021 – Policy Amendments Survey opens

November 2021 – Map Amendments Survey opens

Winter 2021/2022 – Boards & Commissions, presentations of all proposed amendments and summary of public comments

Spring 2022 – Council adoption process readings begin

If there are any questions related to the amendment process, please contact Cole Kitten, Systems Development Division Manager, at 512-974-6442 or [Cole.Kitten@austintexas.gov](mailto:Cole.Kitten@austintexas.gov).

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